

ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Every complete, critical discussion of the divine origin of the Book of Mormon naturally divides itself into three parts:—first, an examination as to the sufficiency of the evidence adduced in support of its miraculous and divine origin; second, an examination of the internal evidences of its origin (1), such as its verbiage, its alleged history, chronology, archaeology, etc.; third, an accounting for its existence by purely human agency and upon a rational basis, remembering that Joseph Smith, the nominal founder and first prophet of Mormonism, was probably too ignorant to have produced the volume unaided. Under the last head, two theories have been advocated by non-Mormons. By one of these, conscious fraud has been imputed to Smith, and by the other, psychic mysteries have been explored (2) in an effort to supplant the conscious fraud by an unconscious self-deception.

In 1834, four years after its first appearance, an effort was made to show that the Book of Mormon was a plagiarism from an unpublished novel of Solomon Spaulding. For a long time this seemed the accepted theory of all non-Mormons. In the past fifteen years, apparently following in the lead of President Fairchild of Oberlin college (3), all but two of the numerous writers upon the subject have asserted that the theory of the Spaulding manuscript origin of the Book of Mormon must be abandoned, and Mormons assert that only fools and knaves still profess belief in it (4). With these last conclusions I am compelled to disagree. In setting forth my convictions and the reasons for them, I have undertaken nothing entirely new, but have only assigned myself the task of establishing as an historical fact what is now an abandoned and almost forgotten theory. This will be done by marshalling in its support a more complete array of the old evidences than has been heretofore made and the addition of new circumstantial evidence not heretofore used in this connection.

It will be shown that Solomon Spaulding was much interested in American antiquities; that he wrote a novel entitled the "Manuscript Found," in which he attempted to account for the existence of the American Indian by giving him an Israelitish origin; that the first incomplete outline of this story, with many features peculiar to itself and the Book of Mormon, is now in the library of Oberlin college, and that while the story as rewritten was in the hands of a prospective publisher, it was stolen from the office under circumstances which caused Sidney Rigdon of early Mormon fame to be suspected as the thief; that later Rigdon, on two occasions, exhibited a similar manuscript which in one instance he declared had been written by Spaulding and left

with a printer for publication. It will be shown further that Rigdon had opportunity to steal the manuscript and that he foreknew the forthcoming and the contents of the Book of Mormon; that through Parley P. Pratt, later one of the first Mormon apostles, a plain and certain connection is traced between Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith and that they were friends between 1827 and 1830. To all this will be added very conclusive evidence of the identity of the distinguished features of Spaulding's "Manuscript Found" and the Book of Mormon. These facts, coupled with Smith's admitted intellectual incapacity for producing the book unaided, will close the argument upon this branch of the question, and it is hoped will convince all not in the meshes of Mormonism that the Book of Mormon is a plagiarism. To those Mormons whose minds are untainted by mysticism, who have the intelligence to weigh evidence and the courage to proclaim convictions opposed to accepted church theories—to such Mormons, though not convinced that the evidence here reviewed amounts to a demonstration, it must be that this essay will yet furnish even to them a more believable and more probable theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon than the one which involves a belief in undemonstrable miracles as well as matters entirely outside of all other experience of sane humans. Certainly the theory here advanced requires for its belief the acceptance of less of improbable assumption than does any other explanation offered. With this statement of what it is expected to accomplish we may proceed to review the evidence in detail.

Solomon Spaulding and his First Manuscript.

Solomon Spaulding was born in 1761 at Ashford, Conn., graduated from Dartmouth in 1785, graduated in theology in 1787, and became an obscure preacher. The fact that Spaulding had become an infidel (5), that in rewriting the first outline of his story he adopted, as he said, "the old Scripture style" to make it seem more ancient (6), and the further fact that he told at least four persons at different times that his story would some day be accepted as veritable history (7)—all of these, combined with the peculiar product, tend to show that one motive for the writing of this supposed novel may have been the author's desire to burlesque the Bible and furnish a practical demonstration of the gullibility of the masses.

While at Dartmouth college, Spaulding had as a classmate the subsequently famous imposter and criminal, Stephen Burroughs (8), which fact furnishes interesting material for reflection as to how far the subsequent ill fame of Burroughs, coupled with personal acquaintance, may have operated in Spaulding as a fruitful suggestion inducing this labor as a means of securing fame through fraud. If Spaulding did not see the possibility of a new and profitable religion in his "Manuscript Found," then he was more short-sighted than was a nephew of his named King. This nephew told one Hale, a school teacher, of his belief that he could start a new religion out of this novel and make money thereby, at the same time briefly outlining a plan very similar to the one long afterward adopted by Smith, Rigdon and company (9). If we can place any confidence in the report of an interview between a Mormon "elder" and a nephew of Solomon Spaulding, then it would appear that in the opinion of the latter's brother Solomon Spaulding was not a man who would be, by conscientious scruples, deterred from practicing such a fraud, if believed profitable (10). Be that as it may, Spaulding did hope by the sale of his literary production to make sufficient money to enable him to pay his debts (11).

In 1809 Solomon Spaulding and Henry Lake built and conducted a forge at Salem (now Conneaut), O., where, in 1812, the former made his second business failure (12).

Spaulding, being an invalid, possessed of a good education and habits of study, naturally took to literary work, which he probably commenced soon after 1809 (13), and continued until his death in October, 1816. During this seven years he seems to have written several other manuscripts (14) besides the two with which we are directly concerned.

Necessarily Spaulding's surroundings

gave some direction to the course of his literary efforts. Envoined as he was in a country where once dwelt the mound-builders, and having himself caused one of the mounds to be opened, with the resulting discovery of bones and relics of a supposedly prehistoric civilization (15), like thousands before him, he was led to speculate upon the character of that civilization and the origin of those ancient peoples. Josiah Priest, in his "Wonders of Nature and Providence" (1824), quotes over 40 authors, half of whom are Americans, and all of whom, prior to 1824, advocated an Israelitish origin of the American Indian. Some of these dated as far back as Clavigero, a Catholic priest in the seventeenth century.

In Spaulding's first writing of his manuscript story, he pretended to find a roll of parchment in a stone box within a cave. In the Latin language, this contained an account of a party of Roman sea voyagers, who, in the time of Constantine, were, by storms, drifted ashore on the American continent. One of their number left this record of their travels, of Indian wars and customs, which record Spaulding pretends to have found and to translate (16). How that resembles a synopsis of the Book of Mormon!

In 1834, when E. D. Howe had in preparation his book, "Mormonism Unveiled," wherein the Spaulding story was first exploited, this first manuscript was given by Spaulding's family to D. P. Hurlburt, the agent of Howe. The Spaulding family, without having made any examination whatever of the papers delivered to Hurlburt, seem always to have believed (17), though without any evidence, that he received and sold to the Mormons the rewritten story entitled "Manuscript Found," which will be more fully discussed hereafter. From Howe this first manuscript story went into the possession of one L. L. Rice, who bought out Howe's business, and later, with other effects of Rice's, it was shipped to Honolulu, and there, in 1834, accidentally discovered by President James H. Fairchild of Oberlin college (18). This manuscript is now in the Oberlin library, and has been published by two of the Mormon sects as being a refutation of the Spaulding origin of the Book of Mormon. It can be such refutation only to those who mistake it for another story. Howe, in 1834, published a fair synopsis of the manuscript now at Oberlin (19) and submitted the original to the witnesses who testified to the many points of identity between Spaulding's "Manuscript Found" and the Book of Mormon. These witnesses then (in 1834) recognized the manuscript, secured by Hurlburt and now at Oberlin, as being one of Spaulding's, but not the one which they asserted was similar to the Book of Mormon. They further said that Spaulding had told them that he had altered his original plan of writing by going farther back with his dates and writing in the old Scripture style, in order that his story might appear more ancient (20).

According to many witnesses, the rewritten "Manuscript Found" (like the Book of Mormon) was an attempt at imitating the literary style of the Bible. So was the manuscript submitted to Patterson, according to his own statement (21). No such indications are found in the Oberlin manuscript, which further evidences that it is not the manuscript of which the witnesses testified, and which Patterson says was submitted to him. The Oberlin manuscript also furnishes internal evidences of an improbability that it was ever submitted to a publisher by any man as sane and well educated as was Spaulding. The plot of the story is incomplete, and the manuscript is full of interlineations, alterations, careless or phonetic spelling, and misused capital letters. These are all easily explainable consistently with Spaulding's erudition, if we view the manuscript as a hasty and careless blocking out of his literary work, but it is not in such a condition as would make him willing to submit it to a publisher.

If we bear in mind that from the beginning it was asserted that this manuscript now at Oberlin was not the one from which the Book of Mormon was alleged to have been plagiarized, then President Fairchild's conclusion that it disproves such plagiarism of course becomes absurd and only demonstrates his ignorance of the early testimony upon which was asserted the connection of the Book of Mormon and an-

other manuscript. This also disposes of the Mormon argument most frequently urged against the theory here advocated.

Either through like ignorance of the evidence of 1834 that this was not the manuscript then being testified about, or through a willingness to play upon the ignorance of others, the two leading sects of Mormons have published this first manuscript as a refutation of a theory which no one ever advocated, viz.: That the manuscript now at Oberlin was the thing from which Smith et al plagiarized the Book of Mormon. In my judgment, the publication of this first incomplete manuscript story furnishes additional evidence that the rewritten story did constitute the foundation of the Book of Mormon. When we remember what was said in 1834 as to the character of changes made in rewriting, and that the rewritten story was revamped by Smith, Rigdon and company, we are astonished at the number of similarities retained; as, for instance, the finding of the story in a stone box, its translation into English, the attempt to account for a portion of the population of this continent, the wars of extermination of two factions, the impossible slaughters of primitive warfare, and the physically impossible armies which were gathered without modern facilities of either transportation or the furnishing of supplies—the fact that after two rewritings, the second being by new authors, there should remain these very unusual features, makes the discovery and publication of this first manuscript only an additional evidence that the second one did furnish the basis of the Book of Mormon.

By always remembering these separate manuscripts and their different histories, much seeming conflict of evidence can be explained, mistaken conclusions accounted for, and confusion avoided. The Mormons, in their publication of this first manuscript story, have labelled it "The Manuscript Found," though no such title is discoverable anywhere upon or in the body of the manuscript in the Oberlin library (22). The evident purpose of this is to further confound that first story with the second or rewritten manuscript which it will be demonstrated really was used in constructing the Book of Mormon, and which manuscript the witnesses to be hereafter introduced described by that title. Having traced to its final resting-place at Oberlin college the first manuscript story, which had no direct connection with the Book of Mormon and never was claimed to have such, let us now, if we can, trace into the Book of Mormon Spaulding's rewritten story, entitled "The Manuscript Found."

Spaulding's Rewritten Manuscript.

Spaulding commenced his writing about 1809, changing his plans while still at Conneaut, that is, prior to 1812 (23), at which later date the rewritten story of "The Manuscript Found" was still incomplete (24). In 1812 Spaulding borrowed some money with which to go to Pittsburg, hoping there to get his novel published and thus make it possible for him to pay his debts (25). In Pittsburg Spaulding submitted his manuscript to one Robert Patterson, then engaged in the publishing business (26). The exact date is not known, but it is probable almost to certainty that Spaulding would do this immediately upon his arrival in Pittsburg in 1812, since that was one of his definite purposes in going there. Spaulding's widow is reported as saying: "At length the manuscript was returned to the author, and soon after we removed to Amity, Washington county, Pennsylvania" (27). The return of the manuscript before 1814, the date of the removal to Amity, is made additionally certain by the testimony of Redick McKee (28) and Joseph Miller (29). This additional evidence, especially that of the latter, makes it plain that Spaulding had his rewritten manuscript at Amity, thus demonstrating its return to Spaulding before the latter's removal from Pittsburg. The evidences of identity between the manuscript testified about as being at Amity, and Spaulding's rewritten story, leave no doubt. The review of this evidence of identity will be postponed until we come to review the other evidences of identity between "The Manuscript Found" and the Book of Mormon.

It is said that Patterson returned the manuscript to Spaulding with the advice to "polish it up, finish it, and

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1. Valuable contributions to this study are Lamb's "Golden Bible" and a pamphlet by Lamoni Call classifying two thousand corrections in the inspired grammar of the first edition of the Book of Mormon.

2. The best effort along this line is Riley's "The Founder of Mormonism." To me the conclusions are very unsatisfactory, because so many material considerations were overlooked by that author.

3. President Fairchild, in the New York Observer for February 5, 1885, that being immediately after his discovery of the Oberlin Manuscript, says: "That theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon in the traditional manuscript of Solomon Spaulding will probably have to be relinquished. Mr. Rice, myself, and others compared it with the Book of Mormon, and could detect no resemblance between the two in general or detail."

4. Some other explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon must be found, if an explanation is required." (Reproduced in Whitney's "History of Utah," 56. Talmage's "Articles of Faith," 278.)

5. Ten years later Mr. Fairchild is not so brash in assuming the Oberlin Manuscript to be the only Spaulding Manuscript, and he certifies only that the Oberlin Manuscript "is not the original of the Book of Mormon." (Letter dated Oct. 17, 1895, published in vol. ix, Millennial Star, p. 697, Nov. 3, 1895. Talmage's "Articles of Faith," 279.)

6. Fairchild's Latest Statement.—In 1900 President Fairchild wrote the Rev. J. D. Nutting as follows:

"With regard to the manuscript of Mr. Spaulding now in the library of Oberlin college, I have never stated, and know of no one who can state, that it is the only manuscript which Spaulding wrote, or that it is certainly the one which has been supposed to be the original of the Book of Mormon. The discovery of this MS. does not prove that there may not have been another, which became the basis of the Book of Mormon. The use which has been made of statements emanating from me as implying the contrary of the above is entirely unwarranted."

"JAMES H. FAIRCHILD."

4. The Deseret News editorially says this on July 19, 1900:

"The discovery of the manuscript written by Mr. Spaulding, and its deposit in the library at Oberlin college, O., . . . has so completely demolished the theory once relied upon by superficial minds that the Book of Mormon was concocted from that manuscript, that it has been entirely abandoned by all opponents of Mormonism except the densely ignorant or unscrupulously dishonest."

And this on May 14, 1901:

"It is only the densely ignorant, the totally depraved, and clergymen of different denominations afflicted with anti-Mormon rabies, who still use the Spaulding story to account for the origin of the Book of Mormon."

5. See Addendum to Spaulding Manuscript at Oberlin college and Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 288.

6. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 288.

7. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 283, 4, 6, 7.

8. "Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs," p. 26, ed. of 1811, shows Burroughs to have entered Dartmouth in 1781, which must have been Spaulding's date of entry, he having graduated in 1785.

9. "New Light on Mormonism," 261.

10. xxxv. Saints' Herald, 820.

11. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 285.

12. "Prophet of Palmyra," 443; Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 279 and 282.

13. "New Light on Mormonism," 13.

14. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 279; "New Light on Mormonism," 13-14.

15. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 284; "New Light on Mormonism," 20.

15. "New Light on Mormonism," 14.

16. "The Manuscript Found." For Howe's synopsis see "Mormonism Unveiled," 288. Whitney's "History of Utah," 49-51.

17. "New Light on Mormonism," by Mrs. Ellen F. Dickinson.

18. Publisher's Preface to "The Manuscript Found," iv. Deseret News, July 19, 1890; 1. Whitney's "History of Utah," p. 49; Talmage's "Articles of Faith," 278-9.

19. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 288; 1. Whitney's "History of Utah," 49.

20. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 288.

21. "The Spaulding Story Examined and Exposed," by John E. Page, 7; "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 7; "Mormonism Exposed," by Williams.

22. xxxv. Saints' Herald, 130; "Prophet of Palmyra," 469.

23. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 288.

24. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 283.

25. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled," 282-3.

26. "New Light on Mormonism," 16-17; "History of the Mormons," 43; "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 7.

27. "Gleanings by the Way," 252; "Mormon's Own Book," 29; "Prophet of Palmyra," 419; "History of the Mormons," 43.

28. Washington (Pa.) Reporter of April 21, 1869; "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 6.

29. Gregg's "Prophet of Palmyra," 441-2.